

Course Summary: Civil Government and Political Discourse

This summary outlines the structure, philosophy, and key activities of Mr. Burkhard's senior-level Civil Government course.

Course Overview and Philosophy

The Civil Government course is a one-semester class for seniors, designed to cover the "interesting stuff" of government, with another teacher, Mr. Clark, taking over for the political science portion in the second semester. The primary pedagogical goal is to help students become informed about how politics affects their lives and to encourage them to develop their own evidence-based opinions through reading, writing, and project-based work.

A central theme is the development of respectful political discourse. The instructor, Mr. Burkhard, positions himself as a neutral facilitator whose allegiance is to the Constitution, not a political party, openly stating his frustration with all politicians ("I hate every freaking politician in the country"). He uses factual, and at times provocative, scenarios (e.g., a hypothetical detention without due process) to explore constitutional principles like the Fifth Amendment. He urges students to "elevate" their thinking beyond inherited biases, using a personal anecdote to illustrate the concept, and to form their own conclusions based on critical thought.

Framework for Classroom Discourse and Key Discussions

Clear rules are established for classroom debate: arguments must be based on evidence, while name-calling, mocking, and hateful language are prohibited. Resorting to personal attacks is framed as an automatic loss in an argument. Key classroom activities and discussions include:

- ****Political Ideology Assessment:**** Students took a political typology quiz to identify their political leanings based on their views on economic fairness, social issues (transgender acceptance, political correctness), the justice system, and America's role in the world.
- ****Exploring Personal Beliefs:**** Through a "Political Roots Questionnaire," students were prompted to identify their core beliefs and trace their origins. A Socratic discussion challenged these beliefs with complex scenarios:

- **"Equal Treatment":** The concept was tested against the example of a convicted rapist, clarifying the difference between equal rights under the law and personal social acceptance.
- **"Thou Shalt Not Kill":** This moral absolute was contrasted with real-world complexities like capital punishment and justifiable homicide in self-defense. The instructor introduced the statistical concept of recidivism, noting that child molestation has the highest rate of re-offense.
- **The Concept of Integrity:** A session was dedicated to defining integrity as the alignment between one's beliefs, promises, and actions. This was explored through case studies:
 - **Teacher Integrity:** Contrasting a coach who unfairly passes athletes (a clear breach) with the ethical dilemma of rounding up a grade for a hard-working student but not for a passive one with the same score.
 - **Student Integrity:** Using AI to plagiarize a paper was presented as a primary example of academic dishonesty, with the act of lying about it being a more significant breach of integrity.
 - **Personal Integrity:** Examples of broken promises and deception in relationships were used to illustrate how a lack of integrity destroys trust.

Pedagogical Tools and Classroom Policies

The course incorporates specific tools, policies, and assessment structures to manage learning and behavior.

- **Innovative Note-Taking:** The instructor records every class, and an AI system generates a summary that is posted online. This serves as the primary source of notes, freeing students to participate more actively.
- **Assessment Structure:**
 - **Quizzes:** Short quizzes (10 questions, 25-40 points) occur every one to two weeks.
 - **Tests:** Larger tests are administered about once a month.
 - **Final Exam:** The district-mandated final exam is worth only 10% of the total grade, making it difficult to significantly alter a student's final grade.
- **Technology and AI Policy:**
 - Students are to use classroom desktops for assignments, not Chromebooks.
 - Phones are permitted only for setting up music on designated work days.

- AI is encouraged as a tool for research and brainstorming but is strictly forbidden for direct copy-pasting. An AI detector will be used, and plagiarism will result in a zero.
- **Classroom Management:**
 - ****Attendance Incentive:****Students receive 20 monthly extra credit points but forfeit them if they leave the classroom more than once per month.
 - ****Late Work:****Extensions on projects are possible but must be requested *before* the due date. Work submitted after an extended deadline receives a zero.
 - ****Grade Transparency:****A chart showing the number of students with D's and F's is displayed as a motivational tool for graduation.

Consolidated Next Steps and Assignments

- **Immediate Tasks:**
 - Complete the Political Roots Questionnaire (25 points, due today).
 - Bring a signed syllabus to the next class.
 - Bring a notebook to the next class period for note-taking.
- **Computer and Website Setup:**
 - Log into the classroom desktop computers using the password `technology1!`.
 - Bookmark the class website: highlandtechnology.org.
- **Ongoing Assignments:**
 - Begin the Political Typology Quiz on the class website.
 - Save the results and political profile description from the typology quiz.
 - Review the assigned political typology profile and write a few words about whether it seems accurate.
 - Open and begin working on the "Integrity Thinking Sheet" assignment.
 - Complete the "integrity sheet" and the "presidential integrity sheet" next class period.